

1-1-2007

Unwrapping Christo

Ruth Bereson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/aesthesis>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Business Commons](#)

To access supplemental content and other articles, [click here](#).

Volume 1, Issue 1

Pages 28-33

Recommended Citation

Bereson, Ruth, (2007). "Unwrapping Christo". *Aesthesis: International Journal of Art and Aesthetics in Management and Organizational Life*, Volume 1, Issue 1, p. 28-33.

<http://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/aesthesis/6>

This Volume 1, Issue 1 is brought to you for free and open access by the Organizational Aesthetics at DigitalCommons@WPI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Aesthesis Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WPI.

Aesthesis

International journal of art and aesthetics in management and organizational life

Strati
AESTHETIC DISCOURSE
IN ORGANIZATIONS

Bereson
UNWRAPPING CHRISTO

Verdi
ART FASHION CITY

Warren
ORGANIZATIONAL
TOPOPHILIA

Scalfi
UNTITLED 2004 # PARIS

Pope
iDREAM.....

Poulson
PORTFOLIO

Nuur
WE SHARE AIR



AESTHESIS: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ART AND AESTHETICS IN MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

This journal is published by THE AESTHESIS PROJECT: The Aesthesis Project was founded in January 2007 and is a research project investigating art and creativity in management and organizational contexts. The project has its roots in the first Art of Management and Organization Conference in London in 2002, with successive conferences held in Paris and Krakow. From those events emerged an international network of academics, writers, artists, consultants and managers, all involved in exploring artistic experimentation and intellectual exploration in the context of management and organizational research. The Aesthesis Project will be developing extensive research and artistic projects internationally, with academic research fellows and associate creative practitioners, publications and consultancy.

EDITORS

Ian King, Essex Management Centre, University of Essex, Colchester, UK

Jonathan Vickery, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Ceri Watkins, Essex Management Centre, University of Essex, Colchester, UK

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR

Jane Malabar

aesthesis@essex.ac.uk

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Dawn Ades, University of Essex, UK

Daved Barry, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal

Jo Caust, University of South Australia and Editor, Asia

Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management

Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, University of Stockholm, Sweden

Laurie Heizler, Wright Hassall LLP, Leamington Spa, UK

Stephen Linstead, University of York, UK

Nick Nissley, The Banff Centre, Canada

Antonio Strati, University of Trento and Siena, Italy

Steve Taylor, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, USA

DESIGN & ART DIRECTION

Jonathan Vickery

DIGITAL ARTWORK

Integra Communications, Oxford

PRINTER

Warwick Print, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

The editorial team would like to thank the advisory board, contributors, reviewers, design and production teams, together with numerous others (far too many to mention) who have been so generous with their support and encouragement since the inception of this venture.

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/aesthesis/>

The views and assertions articulated in this publication do not necessarily represent the views or judgements of the editors or The Aesthesis Project.

ISSN 1751-9853

Aesthesis © 2007: The Aesthesis Project



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Editorial // 6

THERE

Navid Nuur // 10

SENSATIONS, IMPRESSIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE
CONFIGURING OF THE AESTHETIC DISCOURSE IN
ORGANIZATIONS

Antonio Strati // 14

ART AND FASHION IN A
RESPONSIBLE CITY

Laura Verdi //23

UNWRAPPING CHRISTO

Ruth Bereson // 28

WHY USE A PICTORIAL
PERFORMANCE IN A SEMINAR ON
ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

Hervé Colas & Florence Kutten //34

ORGANIZATIONAL TOPOPHILIA: THE COUNTRYSIDE
AND AESTHETIC PLEASURE AT WORK

Samantha Warren //36

UNTITLED 2004 # PARIS

Anna Scalfi //46

I DREAM..... SEVEN DEADLY SINS SERVICES 1 MILE

Nicholas Pope //48

PORTFOLIO

Chris Poulson //55

WE SHARE AIR

Navid Nuur //63

THE FOURTH ART OF MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION CONFERENCE //66

SUBMISSIONS // 74

UNWRAPPING CHRISTO

RUTH BERESON

The name 'Christo' seems as tightly wrapped as the works produced under that name. Firstly the name Christo alone is full of ambiguity. On one level, when we say 'Christo', we think of an artist whose work has been known in the international arena since the early 1960s. I would go further and say that Christo embodies a 'brand', a group of work designed and executed, from drawing to display, by a husband and wife team Christo Javacheff and Jeanne-Claude. This 'brand' if you will has European roots, emerging from two very different cultures, and since the 1960s has transplanted itself to the USA. Both born on the same day in the same year (June 13, 1935), Christo and Jeanne Claude were educated under two very different political regimes. Such things, although simple, cannot be stated enough. For it is in the power of these alliances that they have been able to straddle the geo-political systems we know in order to produce their art work.

The brand of Christo (signed Christo and Jeanne-Claude, but the compound has rarely entered into usage) is a working diplomatic front, a negotiating team which brings the work of art from concept to fruition in many highly visible places around the world. In order to do this many alliances are formed between the artistic, political and business world. Entrepreneurs and politicians need to 'see the light' and participate in areas that they know best led by an enigmatic management team: The Christos.

The Christo unit, if you will, comprises two elements: the artist and the entrepreneur. In its current iteration this has taken on new heights as the brand becomes more identifiable, more visible if you will, the entrepreneurial nature of the enterprise has gained greater and greater significance. We may be expected, even told, to say 'Christo and Jeanne-Claude' but when we say Christo we are identifying at one and the same time the artist and the entrepreneur, and the company C.V.J. Corp (Jeanne-Claude Javacheff), President, as a unit; A successful combination of forces on artistic, cultural, political levels. This paper shall discuss notions of business, entrepreneurship, art, public space and

cultural diplomacy by looking at various meanings of the terms and by giving some historical context about the relationship between the artist, the entrepreneur and society. In particular I will place emphasis on the fact that these notions produce good methods with which to scrutinise the artwork in public space both with local, national and international significance. It is my intention to demonstrate how these factors are given particular meaning in the public arena through the work of Christo, and form part of a larger tradition. Before doing so however I wish to explain what actually brought myself and my colleagues to this subject, and that is to provide a brief background about how we, as researchers, came to be addressing Christo's work in Central Park in February 2005.

On January 22, 2003, Mayor Bloomberg of New York City announced that the Christo Gates project would finally see the light of day after over 35 years of political lobbying and opposition to the concept. We knew therefore that we were about to witness an unusual event. This was compounded by the fact that in New York City at the beginning of this century forces had come to bear (some extremely visible and tragic, others political) whereupon art, business and the use of public space became a critical talking point amongst the population. For the city wished to attract people back both to live and to visit; part of that motivation was financial, and once again arts events were seen, like circuses before them, as a good way of attracting crowds.

My colleague, Graeme Sullivan (himself an artist and academic interested in the relationship between art works and public space) and I were particularly interested in the process of the creation of this event and the many and varied discourses which surrounded it. A year before the event itself the Metropolitan Museum held an exhibition with drawings and displayed sections of the 'machinery' designed and constructed for the event, and with documentary videos about the proposed Gates. This was well attended and the cause of great discussion amongst the local population. This relatively small exhibition (in terms of the usual

size of Metropolitan Museum exhibitions) was, on the occasions when I attended it, crowded to overflowing. Moreover as a regular observer of exhibition audiences in New York I was struck by the fact that the audience was infinitely more engaged in debate about the show than usual. Instead of acting as viewers of an event they were, a year prior to the event itself, already demonstrating some form of engagement. In February 2005 they were poring over these materials as if they too were actors in this upcoming project; the public became the critic and the framers of the debate as they touched and prodded the machinery which would end up in the park. The exhibition focussed the attention of the public on the fact that The Gates were going to happen in New York City – which compounded its social significance as a cultural event, which would draw a local as well as an out of town audience.

In 2003 whilst in Stockholm, I had the pleasure of being introduced by Pierre Guillet de Monthoux to Torsten Lilja, who was the enthusiastic embodiment of this business-art relationship. Mr Lilja is a Swedish entrepreneur who has made his money through banking and ships. He also has a relationship with the arts: he has a foundation and sponsored a pop art exhibition at MoMA in the early 1990s. Suffice to say, he also presented some alluring ideas. It is not often that an academic meets an entrepreneur who sought out, or was even committed to, university discourse analysing business and art functions. Moreover, Mr Lilja earnestly wanted this to cross the Atlantic given the U.S.A's importance in the European business world. Thus the germ of an idea and a collaboration began. We had some interesting component parts: an entrepreneur who wanted to engage into enquiry about the relationship between business and art; a European colleague from a management background who had that European trait of making philosophical enquiry the core of the conversation; as well as a team of students from his new innovative management program who also wanted to ask questions about this genre of art; and lastly an artist/academic who was going to work on the project itself.

Our response to this temporary alliance was to create an academic conference which included many members of the interest groups we wished to observe: financiers, entrepreneurs, journalists, historians, graduate students, the general public – in order to increase our understanding of the notions of spectacle, of public space, entrepreneurship and artistic enterprise. At the risk of starting with a preconceived conclusion, we discovered that the Christo project, The Gates, was an excellent example of diplomacy, business and politics in action. As researchers and teachers we were both critically involved in the process of ‘unpacking meaning’ and also communicating that meaning to others. Thus The Gates served to us also as the subject of a continuing process of enquiry. Given that Christos’ work is based on ‘process’, the two worked well together. We not only organised an event – *Conversations Across Cultures* – but also were participants in it, watching the process of The Gates evolve firstly prior to its construction, to the construction itself, then through the 18 day tour of duty in NYC, until it was dismantled and the park returned to its normal state.

This was very engaging to me as my central field of research is arts management and arts policy. I am interested in the way in which artistic enterprises meet their public. Art can only be said to exist when it elicits a question in the observer a recognition and a response. This recognition or response is what F. R. Leavis would describe as ‘this is so isn’t it?’ Or ‘I do or don’t like that’, for whatever reason, introducing what he described as the Third Realm, the critical realm of debate. Studying the management of such questions can be facilitated by the use of a tool devised by John Pick, which he calls an ‘aesthetic contract’. This is a helpful instrument within my field of inquiry. It means that there exists a contract between the art, artist and audience; that a work of art doesn’t exist in isolation but is dependent upon a good balance between these factors. Making a work of art and not displaying it means that the contract doesn’t work, as is also displaying it to the ‘wrong’ sort of audience. The institutional demand for higher visitor numbers, or involving education, can also skewer the deal. The contract is resolved when it is communicated to its ideal audience and when that audience responds with a question such as Leavis’s. Moreover as society changes, so too does its relationship to art, and the materials needed evolve, as too does the nature of the canvas which the artist uses.

The academic study of arts management has at its core these questions which allow us to juxtapose modern artistic practice in a real ethnographic sense against the way in which given societies operate both now and in the past. The Gates project is a good illustrative example for the study of arts management and demonstration of the aesthetic contract in action because it realises a number of vital points. Christo is using a ‘canvas’ which was not possible in the C19th for example. Moreover, the temporary nature of his work and his concept of art is also uniquely linked to our societies – where concepts can be photographed, filmed, transmitted technologically and therefore gain a physicality greater than their locus. Moreover Christos’ oeuvre, is in essence, that of a ‘process’, and it is this very process has become an integral and substantial part of the work itself. It is a form which on a practical level involves a management unit of some sophistication, which works in the spheres of, finance, art and business, and is lead by an charismatic team of artist and entrepreneur, rolled into a conceptual Brand.

Participants at our conference introduced some interesting ways of observing Christo and The Gates Project.

› Bob Lilja provided an overview of financing deals which enable such projects to take place, leaving all of us with an understanding of the complexity of the fiscal underpinning of the project. The art could not occur without today’s complex banking systems and fiscal undertakings. The entrepreneur and financier on a corporate level needed to link with the artist in order for the product to be realised. He also spoke about the art ideas of Christo and Jeanne-Claude and how these have been enacted over years of planning and collaboration, covering aesthetic interests, technical details, documentation, and the realization of the various projects.

› Pierre Guillet de Monthoux stated the following: “Embedded in the arts are skills and modes of organizing needed by many firms. How then could managers re-connect to art? What difference does it make to manage with an aesthetic perspective?” He asked if his conception of ‘the Art Firm’, as defined by his book of the same title, could become a model for connecting art to business organizations to a democratic discourse, vitalizing public realms?





- › Benjamin Genocchio, Regional Art Critic of the New York Times, spoke about 'Enterprise, Persuasion and the Public'. He examined enterprise-like projects that reflect a movement away from an art practice of picture-making to one where images are created through invention and staging, using large crews and project-based arrangements. Contemporary artists working in photography, installation, multi-media, and time-based productions, like many of their predecessors in recent centuries, present an interesting kind of enterprise model in the visual arts. Here enterprise is a way to 'make things happen' with initiative, problem solving, survival, and project management all being part of cultural production.
- › Italian installation artist Maurizio Pellegrin spoke on 'Venice and New York Crossing Lagoons: Projecting in Venice, Projecting in the World'. In this presentation he analyzed the individual gesture of the artist that becomes a public property, and how public and social property can be an infinite source for the artist's statement. To Maurizio the possibilities engendered by an artistic project, real or virtual, keeps alive the history of places, their symbolism, their iconographies, along with the technical, cultural and geographical features in which an artist has to operate.
- › Sara Cedar Miller, Central Park Conservancy historian and photographer, and author of *Central Park, An American Masterpiece*, spoke about the park itself and the reasons why this project could realistically come to fruition at this point of time.
- › Robert Austin from the Harvard Business School and co-author of *Artful Making*, explained the efficiency of artistic units as management models and how they stimulate creativity, which these days can be understood as 'the new commodity'.
- › The aesthetic philosopher William F. Russell, Professor Emeritus in Foundations of Education, and Maxine Greene, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Education, both provided a poetic critique/interpretation of the event.

*An economic mnemonic does not really accord
 With responses to Gates upon the greensward.
 Gates are intended to bring wonder and joy
 And to resist any management ploy. Perhaps intention is not what one should ask.
 We are lured mysteriously just to bask,
 To avoid the semiotic of orange and green,
 To focus on saffron, the frame for the scene
 Aesthetics/? Irrelevant here.
 The 'innocent eye' is what we revere.
 Gombrich, Danto, Kimmelman indeed!
 There are other texts we are asked to read:
 Christo as subtext; the earth and sky;
 The sun reflected in a dazzled eye.
 Is this to become corporate material?
 Or can we just protest, "But no, it's ethereal."?
 Better to move to some quiet place
 Here in this strange, alternative space.
 No need to analyze nor to explain.
 Why not repress desires for profit or gain?
 This is all transient; it will not remain –
 Like life, like sunshine, like droplets of rain.*

And of course a panel of students gave a critical perspective to the project and their work culminated later in an exhibition responding to it. Much of the discussion in New York surrounding The Gates and much of the fascination of all pundits had to do with the location itself and financing systems which surrounded it: big business, big city and big money created a big spectacle of big art and a big event. These factors provided a mystique in themselves. Today's society has entered the arena of the spectacle in many diverse ways. Communication systems, large publics, increased suffrage and participation in the public domain by implements such as taxation, has increased our individual and collective sense of 'entitlement' and 'rights'. Notions such as 'access', 'policy', and the belief that our individual views matter whatever our socio, political, economic position, have gained increasing importance over the past century. In terms of the arts, these notions have affected how societies view public presentation of art and ways in which the arts should be financed. We know that since the introduction of public subsidy these problems have exacerbated, as not only the public's question about who pays and who enjoys is being increasingly questioned, but so too has the role of the businessman in the arts. The way in which a government

'solves' such questions has since the 1950s come to be understood as a question of policy, within the remit of an institution which takes money from taxpayers and disburses it for public usage.

Now any negotiation between seemingly disparate forces involves a little dance of sorts. This dance, which precedes all negotiations, is really what diplomacy is about. It is a display which leads into conversation and that's the sense in which I'm using the term. The study of cultural diplomacy looks at the cultural discourse between states, or organisations, and again Christo is a good example of diplomacy in action, as his works are used as emblematic signifiers of national prestige and involve large numbers of people both as participants and audience. One can clearly see this in certain projects, such as the wrapping of the Pont Neuf in 1985 (1975-1985), then the Reichstag in 1995 (1971-1995); even one of his very early works, the wrapping of Little Bay in 1969 (one million square feet) in Australia, which could be read on one level as a re-interpretation of the topological/geographical nature of what would be a rampant debate in Australian history: the tyranny of distance.¹

Diplomacy today is a method by which the artist realises their work through careful negotiation, by convincing governments perhaps, or organisations and businesses, that the work will enhance the ways in which they themselves are viewed by others, which in turn will add to their own 'cultural capital'. We see evidence of diplomacy of all kinds in Christo's work, from negotiations with governments, which appeal to the many reasons why an art work might legitimate their regime or make leaders simply look good, to the negotiations with powerbrokers, captains of industry and the like, and to the negotiations with the workers and the public.

This now brings us to the relationship between business and society. Again this is important in the context of The Gates, for Christo made use of the business of art and other worlds as well as the political domains. It is a commonly reiterated fallacy of post-Second World War thinking that 'the arts' are charities which need support by mighty businesses and governments in order to survive, and to save us from the brink of a kind of collective philistinism. This fallacy is so often repeated that we are apt to believe it, but it behoves us to scrutinise

it. I'd like to take the time to remind us here that this modern tendency in thinking is not in fact a true nor good historical reading of the relationship between arts and the commercial world.

At least until the twentieth century the arts were often supporters of failing businesses and were called upon to hold charity benefits where the profits were given to failing industry. We see Hogarth's gift of his work to the founding hospital, and in more recent times, J. M. Barrie assigned the copyright from Peter Pan in 1929 to Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children in London (Seville, 2003). Moreover the distinction between high and low arts is a relatively recent one, which hales from a concept of artist as bohemian, a particular form of C19th aestheticism. There are many examples of art and business being united and a leader in both fields. One only need look at the way in which Wedgwood operated from an artisanal base and yet incorporated the most modern of technologies to enhance its distribution systems. Moreover artists have over time been, not only adept at understanding the political and commercial worlds in which they operated but have also profited greatly from them. One need only look at the career of the revolutionary turned empire artist David – as illustrated in Pierre Guillet de Monthoux's book, *The Art Firm*.

We saw during The Gates in November 2005 some "official" souvenir stands in Central Park, with their proceeds benefiting the Central Park Conservancy, that is, the venue not the artist. Particular stress was given to the fact that Christo only made money from the sale of drawings of the project. Moreover, it was not only the host venue which was benefiting from the event, but there was a host of "unofficial" carts full of NYC and Gates items on the periphery of the park. So the arts can be profitable, and under certain models have supported business and continue to do so today. They have not always had their hand out with beggar bowl to government or business.

I turn now to the role of the entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is someone who takes risks, who takes on a leadership role, who communicates that vision, and who works to realise the vision. And so we sometimes see the entrepreneur and arts manager, sometimes even the artist-manager, coming together particularly in the C19th. Thus for example in France in 1830s, the former medicine salesman and

profiteer turned arts manager, the self-titled 'Dr' Véron, made a big business out of French grand opera. He entitled it 'the triumph of the bourgeoisie', for in that very bourgeois world of Louis-Philippe it was just that. Across the Atlantic we have the very great example of that showman of showmen, P.T. Barnum. Now for the sake of our American/Swedish collaborators he is a good example, for Barnum discovered a Swede – the opera singer Jenny Lind – and 'sold' her like a product to the American public. In his autobiography he writes of this experience 'The Jenny Lind Enterprise'. He stated, 'The public is a very strange animal, and although a good knowledge of human nature will generally lead a caterer of amusements to hit the people, they are fickle, and at times perverse. A slight misstep in the management of a public entertainment frequently wrecks the most promising enterprise.' (Barnum, 1972: 192). We had Jenny Lind gloves, Jenny Lind Bonnets, Jenny Lind riding hats, Jenny Lind shawls, mantillas, robes, chairs, sofas, pianos – in fact every thing was Jenny Lind. Her movements were constantly watched, and the moment her carriage appeared at the door it was surrounded by multitudes, eager to catch a glimpse of the Swedish Nightingale. And of course he brought oddities of all kinds back to Europe, for example, General Tom Thumb, who delighted Napoleon III and Queen Victoria. We also know of other more recent arts business models.

For example, the very origins of the Venice Biennale are rooted in them. The biennale was created in order for the merchants of that city to stimulate business, and they believed that a contemporary art biennale would be such a vehicle. Its sources were mercantile not artistic, and it has reflected in business the ideologies of every regime which has existed since its beginnings in 1893, as the financing and structure of the organisation itself have been at the core of political and economic imperatives. We see this in the Great Exhibition in England in 1851, or the early Thomas Cook tours that were advertised along with train tickets as incentives for visitors. The similarities with marketing techniques we are familiar with is fascinating. Christo himself has reached the pinnacle of marketing: confusing, beguiling, alluring, one and all, to 'roll up– roll up' to their event. Do the techniques of Christo resemble in any way Barnum's 'art', or the great traditions of Madison Avenue advertising?

¹ Expression coined after Geoffrey Blainey's book bearing the title.

Moreover we should also consider the effective machines of totalitarian and communist regimes in harnessing the media to give efficient, projecting homogenous representations of their story to large numbers of people. Certainly Christo understands the importance of political timeliness.

In an interview with Gianfranco Mantegna Christo once responded to a question on such a subject:

Mantegna: Did you ever think that the East-West situation would change in Berlin?

Christo: No, I believe very few people may have thought that, it would have been crazy, foolish to pretend so. The main thing about the project was that it was refused before the ending of the Cold War. If the project had been realized before 1989, before the end of the Cold War, the Reichstag would have been remembered as a footnote in the Cold War history and would be linked with a provocative attitude. If the project had happened before 1989, it would have happened from the Western world to the Communist world and it would have been some kind of arrogant provocation saying, "We can do this and this. You don't understand modern art and you are not capable of coping with those things."

Of course, the Wrapped Reichstag, which is what he is talking about, could have been used in that way, and was a provocative attitude; but it was also like a mausoleum, it was a structure with no use. The Soviet government and the Soviet army had made a point that there would be no political gatherings in the Reichstag; they were very nervous that the Reichstag would become a focal point of the reunification of Germany. This is why there was so much control by the Soviet army, which had jurisdiction over the 28 meters of the east facade of the Reichstag that belonged to the East German military sector. It all was part of the allied superforces controlling the use of the Reichstag.

Looking at the mercantile trading routes across Europe from the C14th onwards, we can see how legislation, taxation, diplomacy, trade, communication systems, commercialism all contributed to the increasingly complex relationship between art and business and the commercial entrepreneur. The steward of today's successful company may simply be using tools well known to their predecessors who bought and sold goods of all kinds including

cultural artefacts. A concept of art as charity works against the artist functioning as entrepreneur, but clearly we see in the work of Christo that this is not the case. Christo makes powerful alliances with business but is in no way a 'beggar'. In many ways he is an example of the increasing professionalisation of the art world. The artist is today rarely simply a practitioner, but also works in the business of art as a marketeer, a writer, a theorist, a salesman, and a grant writer, a negotiator using adroit diplomacy to place their work.

A further factor I wish to explore here is that of location and public space. We know that city planning is an increasingly vital part of urban development. We look back to French examples such as the creation of the Place des Vosges by Henri IV from 1605–1612, the first royal square of Europe with its king's and queen's loge and enough space for the entitled to promenade. The notion of entitlement gradually increased to include other groups, and we see by the beginning of the C18th the creation of the Palais Royal by the duc d'orleans Louis-Philippe, just before the French revolution where he succeeded in creating a place for the newly ascendant classes to 'se promene', 'se flane'. And where the French Ministry of Culture is housed today flanked by the Comedie Francaise and in which public art by Daniel Buren is displayed.

New York City also had its entrepreneurs, architects and visionaries, and from the swamp (an irony considering that the Place des Vosges was also in a swamp [marais]) a usable social space was designed and constructed by the architect Olmstead. Olmstead was well known for his design of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Central Park in itself has quite a history, and has been managed by different public entities, embodying different business relationships between Central Park and the public (well researched by Sara Cedar Miller). In today's world the venue for the display of work has changed. It is no longer possible to say, for example, that artistic works are exclusively displayed in churches or on private domestic walls or even within museums; for today we have art which routinely occurs outside these venues. It's one important aspect of C20th art, that it now uses a larger 'frame' than in any previous century. The notion of the public, and therefore public space, has become more pressing as a consequence of our shift of understanding of both the domain where art can occur, and of the notion

of art's public. Enquiry concerning public space is often linked to taxation and public policy, social space, political geography, along with their dynamics of accessibility and business systems. This is constructing an increasingly complex understanding of Christo's oeuvre which uses public space to a heightened degree.

So what was it that New York witnessed for sixteen days one February, and how can researchers understand its meanings? Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and other colleagues deconstructed much of what occurred during the event itself, but I'd like to add to this and to ask some questions which may shed some light on the Christos as entrepreneurs. Like any sustainable, well financed entrepreneurial project the event itself was well documented and accompanied by descriptive and factual information telling how much material, volume, weight, dimensions and the technology used to put it there. Most would agree that this information became part of the work itself, and contributed to the considerable polemic surrounding something which the artists' claimed was there simply for their pleasure. Most notable was the sheer volume of responses from different parties. The city had become an art critic: from shopkeepers to commuters, to park users or the throngs who attended the event in stadia-like volume. Heated debate emerged in extraordinary detail and hyperbole: finances, aesthetics, public policy, democracy, were addressed by media and the public alike. For example one of my Chinese American students told me that she had organised a group of 20 of her parents' friends to come to see the exhibit. I asked her if she usually did this kind of thing, to which she answered 'of course not', and they would not have normally visited an exhibition in any case. So my next question to her was, 'well, why would they come here?' Her answer was interesting and one which was common in the public domain at the time – they came up to see where over 20 million dollars was spent and what that looked like. I overheard much the same discourse on the subway amongst two students who were discussing the relative morality of spending so much money (an abstract figure at best) on a public event. One such person maintained the view that if it was private money that was no problem; but the other was vehement in defending a belief that this was an 'immoral' position, and that no one should spend such money on ephemera and frivolity, that is, if

money could be mustered for other projects which supported the public good (this, in a city where the gap between 'the haves and the have nots' is visibly obvious, and also where a sum not much less than this was spent by the Metropolitan Museum during the same period on a renaissance painting.)

Perhaps the most endearing was the shop attendant who asked Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and myself if we had been to see *The Gates*, and who spoke about it with a great sense of pride, that something was happening in her city on a scale she could comprehend. She was going that evening, armed with her camera, just to be a part of this event, and for it to give her a place in posterity. Thus I'd like to suggest that what Christo does best is at its heart entrepreneurial, political and diplomatic – alongside product developmental and artistic. Christo is highly skilled in being able to read the geo-political situation as his product moves from prototype to realisation, as their 'Art Firm' sets into production. All his projects involve, to a greater or lesser degree, a winning over not only of the power brokers but also the workers. Christo is adept at creating an organization which is win-win in a short enough period of time that the language does not break down.

One of the lasting images of *The Gates* was the presence of volunteers throughout the exhibition, who would hand out bits of orange fabric (which, it was insistently pronounced, saffron, whatever the spectators' eyes told them) and served as a sounding board for exhibition-goers complaints, questions, ideas, and so on. They were highly visible (in Christo aprons) as they spoke of their pride to be involved in the event, and of the almost god-like status of their patrons. Their scripts were written out for them; they were fed with specially designed meals; and they were pleased to draw in the crowd and tell them this. So – the workers are happy; the movers and shakers are happy; they gurgled about prosperity; the public is happy to see the extraordinary; the market is happy as the art works keep increasing in value; and the critics are happy for distraction. Christo adeptly uses the new role of artist in a novel way, as spin doctors, event makers, propagandists for their works, and enhancers of democratic values, whilst using old fashioned methodologies of regimes better known for five year plans. In conclusion, there is a very complex blend of agents and agency at Christo events:

guides, financiers, businessmen, people for whom Central Park is a daily part of their routines; tourists come to visit the park, like collectors, or project workers. Moreover, the very temporality of the project, in a place where by virtue of the elements there is a constant evolution of experience, is worthy of investigation. The complex and constructed nature of the event lends itself to multiple forms of methodological analysis.

These many factors, I have suggested, are skilfully rolled up into the Christo brand which is massaged carefully by Christo and Jeanne-Claude. For brands to be successful they need to speak to an audience and be endorsed by them. This is what Christo has successfully employed through diplomacy, agency, art and enterprise. In giving such scrutiny to the work, we too are endorsing the brand in a sense by studying it so critically – giving it agency, as more than 'an event', 'an artwork', a 'collector's piece', asking questions of how it is sustained in a business world, as an enterprise, as even an economic model of 'development'. Of course unlike other brands its importance will finally lie in the hands of historians and critics who will decide whether it was 'mediatic', 'business', or even more disputably, 'art'. David was remembered as a second rate artist of the revolution, but a wonderful event organiser of days such as *la fete de l'etre supreme* for Robespierre.

What on many levels Christo the brand can mean, it will require more exhaustive unravelling than I have the time for here. Whilst I was writing this, a common iconographic image came to mind – what do circus tents always display? Flags? Nonetheless perhaps only the circus ringmaster, the consummate entrepreneur, leader and magician, the master of puffery, understands and can unravel these questions. //

REFERENCES

- Austin, R. and Devin, L. (2003), *Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know about How Artists Work*, New York: Prentice Hall.
- Barnum, P. T. (1972) *Barnum's own Story: The Autobiography of P. T. Barnum*, Peter Smith Publisher [1855].
- Blainey, G. (1966) *The Tyranny of Distance. How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, Melbourne, Vic. Sun Books.
- Christo and Jeanne Claude (1996) *Projects selected from the Lilja Collection* (Preface by Torsten Lilja. Photographs by Wolfgang Volz. Text

by Perp Hovdenakk), London: Azimuth Editions Limited.

Guillet de Monthoux, P. (2003) *The Art Firm Aesthetic Management and Metaphysical Marketing from Wagner to Wilson*, Stanford University Press.

Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice, France (1989) *Selection from the Lilja Collection* (Texts by Torsten Lilja, Claude Fournet, Pierre Restany, Werner Spies and Masahiko Yanagi. Photographs by Wolfgang Volz).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2004) *On the way to the Gates, Central Park, New York City: Christo and Jeanne-Claude*.

Pick, J. and Protherough, R. (2003) *Managing Britannia Culture and Management in Modern Britain*. Edgeways Books.

Seville, C. (2003) 'Peter Pan's Rights: "To Die Will Be An Awfully Big Adventure"', *Journal of the Copyright Society of the USA*, Vol. 51.

Sullivan, G. (2005) *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*. Thousand Islands, CA: Sage.

<http://www.jca-online.com/christo.html> (accessed 12 nov 05)

An interview with Gianfranco Mantegna; <http://www.jca-online.com/christo.html> (accessed 12 nov 05)

Ruth Bereson is Associate Professor and Director of the University of Buffalo's (US) program in Arts Management.
Email: bereson@buffalo.edu

CREATIVE PRAGMATISM



At Vital we'll never
promise you the world.

We'll give you honest counsel,
smart thinking and effective
creative solutions.

But without the fluff.

Vital®

creative communications

www.getvital.co.uk